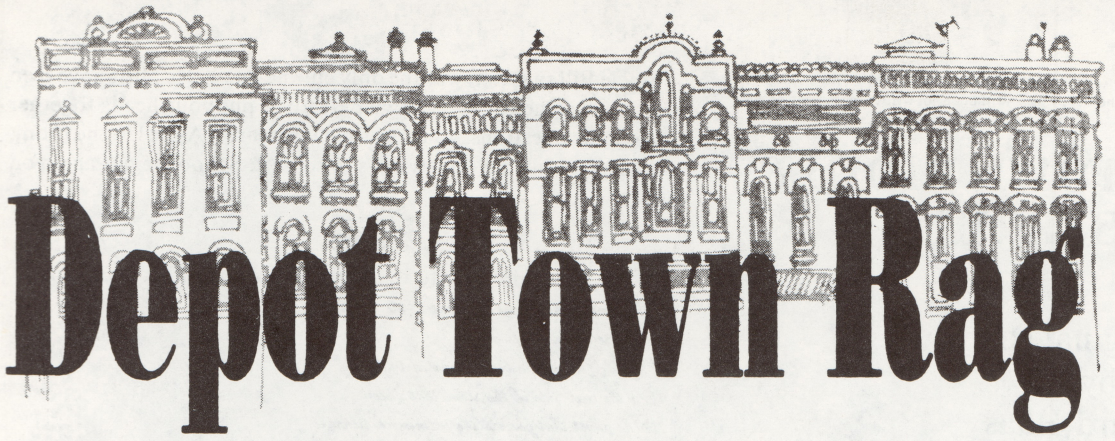
1986

December



Depot Town Rag

FREE 100% RAG CONTENT

A PUBLICATION OF THE DEPOT TOWN ASSOCIATION, INC. The Caboose, 400 Market Place, Ypsilanti, Michigan 48198

Ypsilanti, Michigan: A Festive Place to Live

This old town seems to be in almost continuous celebration of it's own existance:

* The Ypsilanti Heritage Festival
* The Black Arts Festival
* The Frog Island Jazz Festival
* Boomer Days
* The Governor's Cup Hydroplane Races
* The Winter Jazz Series
* Drum Corps International
* EMU's public events have become a vital part of the community
* and now, The Festival of Lights which was developed by our Visitors and Convention Bureau.

New York City used to bill itself as a 'summer festival,' but Ypsilanti can brag about its year-round celebration.

A Special Holiday Format

What do Jonesy, Ms Patterson, Foster Fletcher, Mr. Meadows, Sandee French, and "a woman from the Alibi" have in common? Put them all together in a story set in Ypsilanti's Depot Town and you'll see.

Richard Haas' "The Depot Town Riddle: A Mystery" sets them in action between the Alibi Bar, the Follett Hotel, Frog Island, Millers' Ice Cream, the Ypsilanti Historical Museum and the Thompson Building -- and even the 1939 train wreck figures into the fascinating plot.

Two kids spend their winter vacation solving the mystery; and you're invited to join them in this special holiday issue of The Rag. Happy Holidays!

- the Depot Town Association , Inc.

Festival of Lights /An update of an old tradition:

Frederick Law Olmstead would have enjoyed the 1986 Festival of Lights in Riverside Park, but he didn't think much of Ypsilanti's trees and parks when his company visited here in 1915.

Olmstead was the best known landscape architect in America and was reknowned for his work on New York's Central Park, Detroit's Belle Isle and Vanderbilt's gardens at Biltmore, outside Ashville, North Carolina. The Olmstead company toured Ypsilanti and made recommendations for the planting and greening of the town.

- They were embarassed at our stately water tower and suggested Gothic Revival remodeling.
- They claimed our spectacular gardens at the Depot were 'unnatural and overdone.'
- They looked with alarm at the fact that our mills had been dumping into the Huron River for many years.
- Many of our natural resources in Ypsilanti had been either abused or ignored and the Olmsteads' criticism was so biting that they didn't get the job of designing a re-planting of the city. The Olmsteads left Ypsilanti to their own devices.

Since that time, Ypsilanti has made many changes in its private and public planting as well as in its centrally located Riverside Park. Today's park shows much of the tradition of Olmstead's work:

- wandering paths through groves and along the river
- naturalistic designs repeated in curbs, parking areas, roads and paths
- axial views toward focal points of unusual species of plants and trees
- public furniture in the form of pavillions, stages, benches
- a wide variety of flora native to the region but planted to appear as natural growth.

Reproductions of Nineteenth Century post lamps have taken another step at creating a Victorian park in a City which boasts some of the best architectural examples of that period.

This season's display for the holidays adds a dimension which was impossible in Olmstead's time: displays and trees decorated with thousands of electric lights, calling attention to the trees, river, pathways and other amentities of the naturalistic park - at night. Whether today's citizens drive or walk through the Festival of Lights, it's one more instance of the 'good old days' being recalled as the 1980's in Ypsilanti.

We thank the many public spirited business, organizations and individuals who have contributed to making this event a reality. Ypsilanti is fast returning to the Nineteenth Century elegance it once dreamed of. Even Fred Olmstead would like it here, today.

December Events:

Madrigal Concert
Aubree's Second Floor
12/7 7 p.m.

"It's A Wonderful Life"
Freight House
12/14 6 p.m.

Foundation
Caboose
12/4 8 p.m.

Engine Club
Old Fire Hall
12/14 5 p.m.

Association
Caboose
12/18 7:30 p.m.

Festival of Lights
Riverside Park
through 1/7/87

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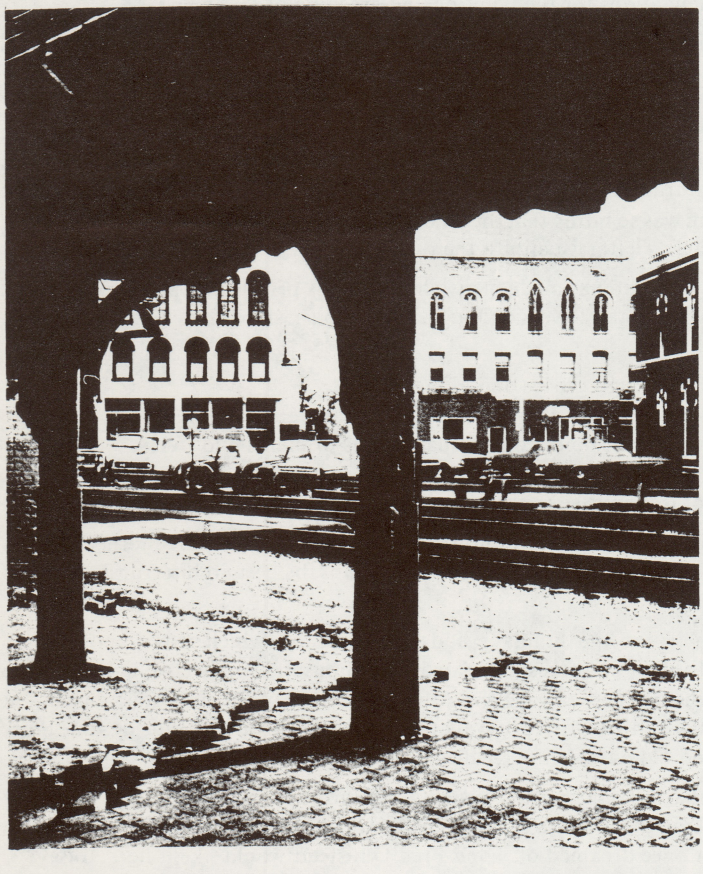
"THE DEPOT TOWN RIDDLE: A MYSTERY"

An Original story by Richard Haas

My father said he became an electrician naturally. He was afraid of the dark. It wasn't a good joke then (and it isn't now), but it has made me wonder how I became a historian.

I could have become a detective. Come to think of it, there isn't much difference between a detective and a historian. That was particularly true when I was twelve, and visited my cousin, Tommy, in Ypsilanti. It turned out to be a week I wanted to repeat many times in my life.



My visit to Ypsilanti came during the last week of the winter vacation. Tommy and I were supposed to fill our days sleding and making snowmen. There was little chance of that. It was bitter cold, and only an inch of snow had fallen.

We were bored, and it showed. I imagine that's why Tommy's father (my Uncle Bill) gave us that old piece of brown paper. It was a riddle, written goodness know when, and offered to us as a gift. His only clue was that he found it when he worked on the basement walls of the Alibi Bar. Tommy was not impressed.

"Some gift," Tommy muttered, "an old piece of stupid paper and a clue that doesn't help at all."

Uncle Bill said that was the only clue he knew. He must have seen our discouragement. "If you two detectives put your heads together and ask some questions, you may find a treasure." As he left the room, he said, "You only have a few days to solve it. School begins again on Tuesday."

I took the riddle over to the fireplace to study it. It was tough.

"Flower to the East, Flour to the West,
Far above the frogs,
And Jenny, the bird, sings in between,
On the coal side of the street that's seen
The ghost that guards the trainwreck treasure,
Right where the stars took their measure,
Far above the frogs,
And those who learn will be laid to rest,
Down among the frogs."

"Tommy, I like the idea of a treasure. We could get rich."

Tommy mumbled something back to me. I asked him to repeat it. "I said we could get dead, too."

"What do you mean 'get dead'?"

Tommy came over to the fireplace. There were little goosebumps on his arms. "It says right there, Jane, "he pointed to the riddle, "And those who learn will be laid to rest."

"So?"

"Good gravy, Jane, 'laid to rest' means dead!" He thought that would shock me, but it didn't. So he continued. "If there is a treasure, then there's something that doesn't want us to find it. And that something might kill us if we find it."

I told Tommy he was afraid of ghosts.

"I'm not afraid of ghosts," he snapped back. "Just respectful." He left the room. He also left me thinking that Uncle Bill's gift might just as well be thrown into the fire.

By lunchtime, Tommy's mood had changed. He already had plans for his half of the treasure. It was a rent-a-bike business. I was invited to join him in the venture. He said we could retire at 16, and not have to go to school after that.

And so, with dreams of bicycles dancing in our heads, Tommy and I found ourselves in front of the Alibi Bar in depot town. Except for a few modern storefronts, the building looked as old as the brown piece of paper.

The sun was shinning, but it was bitter cold and windy. We were both stamping our feet on the sidewalk to keep them warm. It wasn't working.

"Tommy," I said with my teeth chattering, "if we don't go in there, we're going to freeze."

Tommy didn't answer. He just stared at the door. I tried again, "What do you want, Tommy, to be killed by a ghost or freeze to death?"

"Jane," he snapped, you're not from around here. Don't you know we're about to break the law?" He leaned against a parking meter. "You've got to be 21 to go in there, or they'll throw you into jail."

I said jail would be warmer than standing outside, and I headed for the door.

"Okay, okay," Tommy said as he caught up with me, "but act grown up."

And that's what he did. We walked into the Alibi Bar as though we were 21. Maybe even real old, like 30. I think it was the way we walked.

It was dark inside the Alibi, and filled with strange smells. There were a few video games blinking their red and blue lights at us. A woman was serving a beer to one of the men sitting at the bar. She saw us and started to come our way.

Tommy grabbed my arm. "Here it comes, Jane. I told you so. You and your big ideas. Let's get out of here."

Tommy turned to leave, but stopped when the woman asked, "What'll you have? A shot of whiskey?"

I answered that we only wanted to ask a question. She assured us that there was no charge for answers. That's when Tommy and I realized that we didn't know what to ask.

She waited for us to speak. We didn't know what to say.

"So you really want a shot of whiskey, huh?"

I blurted out what was on my mind. "Have you found a treasure lately?"

Suddenly, a squeeky voice rang out. "Treasure?" The squeeky voice came from an old man sitting at the bar. He wore a long woolen overcoat and a baseball cap. He needed a shave. "I'm the only treasure in this place!"

The woman laughed. "Hush up, Jonesy, let the kids talk."

I remember I felt the friendliness of the place. I thought it would be all right to walk up to the bar. I could just barely see over it. I didn't think I should try to crawl up on the stool. "My uncle found this here," I said, "in the basement."

The woman said, "Sure, I remember this. He showed it to me. I said finders-keepers."

"Does it make any sense to you?" I asked.

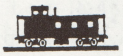
"Not to me, she answered. "But maybe old Jonesy can help. He's lived in depot town for years."

Old Jonesy took the riddle. He held it up to catch the light. "It's too dark in here for these old eyes. Anyway, this is no place for kids. Come on, I'll treat you to some ice cream over at Miller's." Old Jonesy limped out of the bar, waving at us to follow.

I didn't like the idea. "Tommy, we should not accept treats from strangers."

"Oh, Jane, come on. Now you're the one who's scared." Tommy followed after Jonesy. "Anyway, it's broad daylight."

I was trapped. It was either follow along with a stranger, or be left alone in the Alibi Bar. "You're just hungry for ice cream," I yelled. "Some detective you are." The moment the door shut I took off after them.



The ice cream was eaten in silence while Old Jonesy studied the riddle. Sometimes he held it out at arm's length. Then he'd hold it right in front of his eyes. I think he needed glasses. He finally spoke. "Flower' and 'flour' - you'd think that guy could have made up his mind which way to spell it."

I told Jonesy I had though[5] the same thing. "Do you think he couldn't spell, Mr. Old Jonesy?"

"Just plain Jonesy will be fine, young lady." He picked up his ice cream dish and licked it clean. Tommy started to laugh, so I kicked him under the table.

"Nope," Jonesy continued, "I think he meant both things. But the coal side of the street is kind of odd. I wonder if he meant the cold side of the street."

Tommy placed his head in his hands. "This is too confusing. How can we solve a riddle that isn't even spelled correctly?"

Suddenly, Jonesy slapped the table with his hand. Tommy jumped in his seat. "Here's what I think, kids."

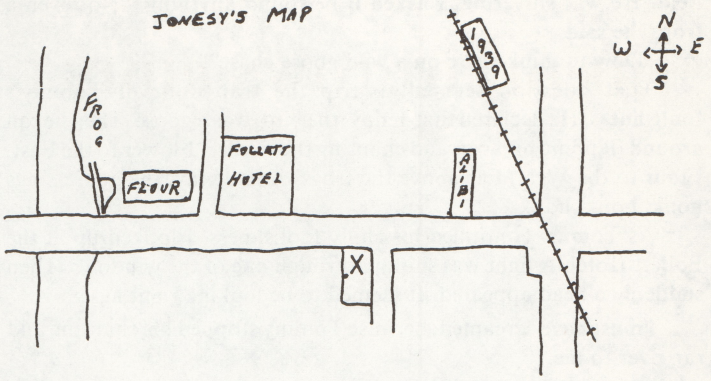
"Jonesy," I said, "we're detectives."

"Why of course you are," he agreed. "Detectives, and maybe even treasure hunters." He took a stubby pencil out of his overcoat and started to draw a map on a napkin. "We're sitting right here." He placed an X in a box on the map.

Tommy's eyes started to grow big. He was more a treasure hunter than a detective.

"And now," said Jonesy, "flour means the old flour mill that used to sit right here across from the Follett Hotel. It's not there now. And frog just has to mean Frog Island, right here."

Jonesy rubbed his hands together. "And here comes the big one. There was a trainwreck right here in 1939."



"Hot dog," said Tommy. "We're moving now!"

Jonesy put up a hand to cool Tommy's excitement. "I never heard of a treasure. Now that doesn't mean there isn't a treasure. It just means that I never heard of one."

Tommy and I looked at each other like motherless calves. Without saying a word, we both knew what the other was thinking: What if there wasn't a treasure? We might have gone on feeling sorry for ourselves if Jonesy hadn't burped.

"Whoops! Sorry, I guess I'm not used to ice cream. Think I'll go wash it down at the Alibi." He placed some money on the table for the ice cream and put on his baseball cap. "You two let me know what you learn. That way I can measure your success."

I promised Jonesy that we'd let him know. We watched him limp through the traffic on Cross St., on his way to the Alibi.

"I know there's a treasure over there, somewhere," Tommy said. It's just a matter of staring long enough to see it."

I admired Tommy's determination, but I had to remind him that it might not be on the north side of the street. "It's supposed to be on the coal side, whatever that means."

Guess you're right," he admitted. And if the riddle means cold side, then I'm cold enough to make it this side of the street. Anyway, that riddle could be 100 years old. A lot of those buildings could be new. How many have been torn down or burned up?" Tommy's determination didn't last any longer than he could hold his breath. I thought it was my fault that he felt defeated, so I listed off what we had learned.

"We have a map. We know about the flour mill and Frog Island. Plus, we know that the trainwreck happened in 1939, so the riddle can't be older than that."

The review of our accomplishments seemed to work, because Tommy brightened up. He suggested that we check out Frog Island on our way home. "Come on, Jane, it's getting dark."

Frog Island is not an island. A long time ago, a trench, called a race, was dug along the east side of the island. Water would race down the trench with enough force to move the big wheel that ground flour at the mill. The trench was closed off a long time ago. So, when Tommy and I walked down the steps to the footbridge that led to Frog Island, there was no running water under the bridge. It was quiet, except for the ripple of water out in the river.

It might not have sounded eerie in the broad daylight, but it seemed strange in the last light of day. As we walked down the stairs, the bridge blocked out the sunset. It grew darker suddenly, and colder, too.

Tommy pulled up the collar of his coat and started to search under the bushes near the river. I scuffed along the cinder track that runs around the football field, and wondered where I could look for a clue.

Tommy came out of the bushes and joined me in the middle of the field. He was shivering. I asked if he found anything. "Not even a frog," he said.

"Do you think we're on a wild goose chase?"

That question seemed to trip the trap door of Tommy's foolishness. He declared that Jenny, the bird, was a goose. Then he ran around flapping his arms and chanting the riddle. "Flower to the East, Flour to the West, Far above the frogs. And Jenny, the goose sings honk, honk, honk."

As Tommy continued his chilly foolishness, I looked up at the Follett Hotel. A light was shining through one of the windows. Then suddenly a head appeared. It seemed to be looking right at us.

I must have screamed, because Tommy stopped his chanting and ran over to me.

"What's the matter?"

"Tommy, there was a head up there, looking at us."

By the time Tommy looked, the head was gone. A light could still be seen flickering. "Jane, that's not fair. You're trying to scare me." He was annoyed. "Anyway," he said, "ghosts don't use flashlights!"

"Who said anything about ghosts? I said it was a head." I couldn't take my eyes off the window.

Tommy was certain I was pulling a joke, and he was determined not to fall for it. I grabbed his arm, and he wasn't happy about that either.

"Come on ghosty-whosty," he mocked, "raise up you head."

It was as though Tommy called the head back, because just then the head appeared. And again, it seemed to be looking right at us.

Without a word, we ran. I could almost keep up with Tommy. Then he tripped and fell flat on the cinder track. He skidded across it, but was quickly back on his feet. City blocks disappeared under our feet. I don't recall any traffic - that's how fast we ran.

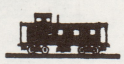
In what seemed like minutes, we were back on Tommy's front porch. We filled the air with steam as we huffed and puffed to get our breath back. Tommy sat down on the step and noticed that his knee was scraped badly. It was bleeding. His pants were torn and his coat was filthy.

"See," he said, glaring at me, "see what you've done?"

It quickly became my fault that he fell. Boys are like that. I assured him that I wouldn't tell his folks, and that I'd help hide his pants, clean his coat, and patch his knee. He calmed down a little, but he had to have the last word. "Dumb old head. Dumb old Jonesy. Dumb old riddle. I could die of blood poisoning."

"Do you think, Tommy, that the head was just a janitor?"

He said he didn't want to talk about the riddle until the morning, and maybe never. He spent the night pouting in front of the television set. Whenever he was out of sight of his parents, he limped with great pain. It was all for my benefit.



Tommy still limped around after breakfast. "Don't worry, Jane, I'm not going to die. Not now, anyway." He walked over to the fireplace, where he sat down and pointed his knee toward the fire. He rubbed it lightly. I've got to keep myself healthy so the ghost can kill me."

That was Tommy's way of saying he was sorry for what he had said last night. It was also his way of saying he still wanted to solve the riddle.

I had worked out what I called an investigation. We had to double-check some information, and find new clues. Tommy was supposed to visit his biology teacher, if she was at home, and ask about frogs — if they were poisonous and stuff like that. The idea was that maybe Frog Island wasn't the real clue.

I was going over to the Historical Museum and ask some questions. "Couldn't hurt," I said.

"Couldn't help, either," Tommy said. He wasn't thrilled about my plan, but he didn't have anything better to offer. Anyway, I knew he'd go along with the plan. I promised to buy ice cream at Miller's. We were supposed to meet there.

The Museum was a big old building. Inside, it looked like a house. It had a living room and a parlor. It even had a kitchen. The trim was all old natural wood. The browns were soft and made the faded reds and blues of the furniture seem warm. But I didn't want to sit on the chairs or sofas. They were too old.

The woman in charge of the archives, Ms. Patterson, brought out pictures of old depot town for me to look at. Some man came in a few weeks ago, she said, and made copies. There were xerox copies for me to take. They didn't cost much.

Foster Fletcher - he was the historian - seemed to know everything. I remember thinking he could have been as old as depot town, and he whistled a lot. He whistled all the time, except when he spoke. I like that. He answered every question I had. Once again, the problem was I didn't know what questions to ask and not give away the riddle. I took notes, though, as fast as I could. It wasn't fast enough, but I had ears, too.

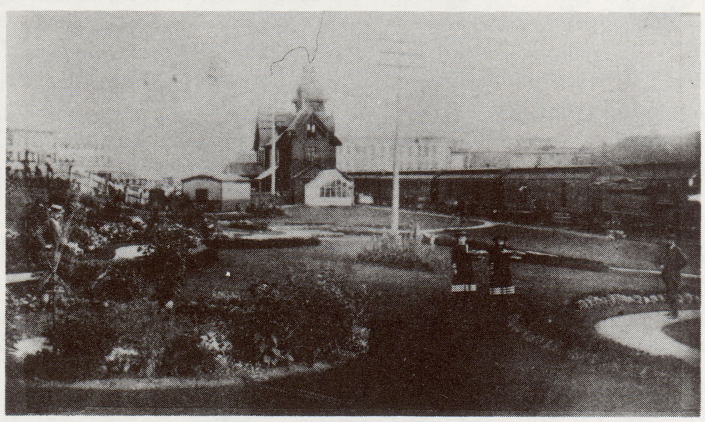
I ran all the way to Miller's. It wasn't far. Down the hill, across the bridge, and into what I was beginning to think of as my depot town.

I couldn't wait to tell Tommy all I had learned, but he wasn't there. I ordered ice cream for both of us, and ate both of them before Tommy's head peeked around the door. He was grinning.

"F-l-o-w-e-r-s," he spelled it out slowly. Then he threw open the door, sat down at the table, and didn't even notice that I had eaten his ice cream. "Flowers, Jane," he nearly screamed. "The depot had a flower garden. The women on the train were given bouquets when they stopped in Ypsilanti. So there are the flowers." He pointed with great confidence in the direction of the depot.

I did a snotty thing just then. I held up a xerox copy of the gardens at the depot. I shouldn't have done it that way - I know that now - but I had my own excitement to share.

Tommy wasn't hurt that I had stolen his surprise. "It's true, then," he said, squirming in his seat. "Gramma was right!"



"Gramma?" I asked,

"Yeah, my teacher didn't know anything about flowers and depot town, so I went over to Gramma's. She knew all about it." He shook a finger at me, like teachers do sometimes. "You know, you ought to ask old people when you want to find out what happened a long time ago."

I began to unload my pockets of the other xerox copies and the notes I took. Tommy continued his lecture.

"My teacher said frogs in the United States weren't dangerous. Some people eat them. Can you imagine that, eating a frog? Well. mostly the legs. She said they taste like chicken. I though I was going to puke."

We studied the xerox photos and found the old flour mill. Tommy said that proved that Old Jonesy knew what he was talking about. "Flour, flower, frog and trainwreck - we're getting close, Jane." Tommy was brimming with confidence. It's old people. We've got to check with old people."

I asked Tommy if he wanted any ice cream. He didn't hear me. He was studying a photograph, holding it at nose length.

"Where is this, Jane? Where's this building?"

I recognized it and was delighted to show off what I had learned. "That's the old Thompson building, built in 1859 or 60." I pointed over to the large building near the depot.

Tommy put his finger on a wagon in the picture. "What's that say? Does it say 'coal'?"

We put our heads down and squinted at the picture. The sign on the wagon did say 'coal'. "Tommy, the Thompson building was used to sleep soldiers during the Civil War. Some of them scratched their names on the walls. You can still see their names."

I thought he would be impressed. He wasn't. He jumped up and ran out of Miller's, saying he was going to tell Old Jonesy. I followed him across the street. Tommy ran into the Alibi. I wasn't going in there again, so I waited for him to come out.

It didn't take long. In a few minutes, Tommy came outside holding on to Jonesy's hand. "Listen to this, Jane. Tell her, Jonesy." Tommy's head was bouncing up and down, like he was saying 'I told you so'.

Old Jonesy said he had heard about Jenny Lind a famous singing star, who sang in the Follett Hotel. "That's up on the third floor where there's an old ballroom."

Tommy interrupted Jonesy. "Tell Jane her nickname. Go ahead, tell her."

I was going to correct Tommy. I thought he was being rude, but Jonesy continued. "The 'nightengale', the 'Swedish nightengale'; that's what they called her. That's a bird, you know."

Jonesy continued talking, but Tommy bolted away and ran down the block toward the Follet Hotel. "General Tom Thumb performed up there, too. Only three feet tall, he was. Full-grown, too."

I yelled a thank-you to Jonesy as I ran away to catch Tommy. He was standing in front of the Follett, looking at a door. It was just like the time we stared at the door of the Alibi. Just then, the door opened and a man walked out. He smiled at us.

"Is there a ballroom on the third floor up there, Mister Sir?" I think I blurted my question, because he acted a little suprised.

"It's Mr. Meadows, young lady, and there certainly is a ballroom." He hesitated for a moment, and then added, "It's being remodeled. I wouldn't go up there. It could be dangerous."

Tommy and I looked at each other. I believe we were thinking the same thing: Why did the man have to say it was dangerous?

I called after the man, "Mr. Meadows, does the ballroom have windows that look out on Frog Island?"

"It sure does," he said, and walked away.

At dinner that night, Tommy's father asked how we were coming along with the riddle. We said we had learned a few things. We didn't want everyone to know what we knew. Afterall, if there was a treasure, it was ours; we had done the work.

Tommy and I camped out by the fireplace that night. We wanted to stay up late and go over our clues. Camping out was the only way we thought we could get away with staying up late.

When everyone had gone to bed, we brought out all our information; Jonesy's map; the xerox copies of the photos; my notes from the Museum; and the riddle itself. We checked one photo carefully, just to be sure that a flour mill once stood across from the Follett.

We shoved to the side everything we didn't need. We had memorized about all of it. All we needed now was to use our heads. In Tommy's case, that might have been impossible. He was ready for action. He pulled out the tools he had selected: a hammer, a crowbar, and a flashlight. He also had plans for packing snacks, in case we got hungry.

All the clues pointed right to the ballroom. There were also clues that said we shouldn't even try: the ghost in the riddle; the head in the window; and Mr. Meadows saying the ballroom was dangerous.

But we were ready, except for one thing. "Right where the stars took their measure" still didn't make any sense. I told Tommy that we had to figure it out.

"The way I have it figured," Tommy spoke as though he knew everything, "where the stars shine through the window is where the treasure is."

"That's got to be the silliest thing I ever heard. Stars don't shine through windows. The moon might, and streetlights, but not stars."

Tommy looked at me like I had taken away his flashlight. "Well then, smarty, where do you think it is?"

"I don't think it means stars like planets and moons. I think it means stars like Rod Stewart." I had to stop there. I didn't have the slightest idea where Rod Stewart took his measure.

Tommy almost jumped out of his sleeping bag. "In the dressing room, that's where." He was proud of himself. "See? When stars get

fitted for their costumes, it's in the dressing room. That's where the treasure is!"

It made sense to me, I remember. I was just hoping the ballroom had a dressing room.

"I'd like to tell Jonesy," Tommy said. "He'd be pleased that I figured it out."

"Why tell Jonesy? We ought to keep this to ourselves."

Tommy acted like I was being unfair. "He said, Jane, that he wanted to keep track of us."

"No, he didn't." I was certain of that. "He said he wanted to . . ." I couldn't remember the exact word, "to something or other our success. Remember? He said it in Miller's."

"What difference does that make." Tommy thought I was getting picky. "It means the same thing. Anyway, if you want to know he said he wanted to 'measure our success'."

Tommy had no more than finished the sentence than he clapped his hands. "That's it, Jane!"

Tommy was right. Our little argument had made us stumble across the last clue. Stars measure their success by how much the audience applauds for them. And since audiences applaud when the star is on stage, that's where the treasure had to be. Under the stage, that's where - if there was a treasure.

Three o'clock the next afternoon found us in what had become a familiar position. We were staring at a door, and wondering what to do. The door, of course, opened on to the stairs of the Follett Hotel. Tommy was holding a large paper bag, containing two bottles of pop, a bottle opener, two peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, and two small bags of potato chips. One of the bags was onion flavored. I didn't know which one of us would eat those. We both hated them, but that's all the kitchen had. The sack also held the hammer and flashlight, and the crowbar stuck out of the top of the sack.

I told Tommy we were attracting attention. He said he wanted to reconnoiter the place.

"You want to what?"

"Reconnoiter." He spoke out of one corner of his mouth. "This is a reconnaissance manuever, Jane. It's something you've got to do."

"Well, I'm not going to do any of whatever-that-is. I'm going to get some ice cream. Want any?

It was remarkable how Tommy's preliminary investigation was completed at the same time I invited him for ice cream. He still insisted that he was "casing the joint".

All the reconnoitering and casing came down to a simple plan. Just before it got dark, we would go up to the ballroom and look around. That way we would have a little light, and maybe not have to use the flashlight. After 5 o'clock, people would leave the Hotel, and then we could tear up whatever boards we thought had to be removed.

That was the tricky part. We didn't want to hurt anything. We didn't want to break the law. Finding a treasure was not stealing - we were sure of that. But tearing up somebody's boards could land you in jail. We were also sure of that. That's why we hoped for old, rotten boards.

With hundreds of second thoughts, and with stomachs turning, we found ourselves climbing the stairs of the Follett Hotel. The second floor had hallways and doors to offices. We tiptoed. Tommy's sack kept rattling. You just can't keep paper quiet.

We finally found a door with a can of paint in front of it, to keep it closed. Tommy said he knew it was the door to the attic. "From now on, Jane, we whisper."

I didn't have to be reminded. As soon as the door was opened, we saw the stairs. They went up and turned to the left. The walls were chipped, and there were patches of old flowery wallpaper. It was also dark, darker than we wanted it to be, but we didn't need a flashlight.

We walked slowly up the winding stairs. A creaky step froze us. that one," Tommy whispered, and then he spit on the step. "That's to mark it."

The stairs wound around to large doors, one of which was open. Past the doors was the ballroom. This was it.

The last light of day glowed through the tall windows. Piles of old boards gave the room some order. There were places to walk.

"It's bigger than I though it would be," said Tommy, looking up at the high ceiling. Most of the ceiling had been torn away, except for some fancy plaster designs. We quickly learned where the floor had been taken out. We had to memorize the room when it was light, so we wouldn't trip over something when it got dark.

I went over to the windows along the west wall. Mr. Meadows was right. I could see parts of Frog Island. That discovery didn't help, because it only reminded me of the head in the window.

Just then, a door slammed downstairs. Tommy and I looked at each other, and without saying a word, we knew to be quiet. We sat down on a pile of boards to wait until everyone left the building. I whispered to Tommy that our job was to locate the stage. We narrowed it down to two choices.

Behind us, on the east side, was an elevated area that ran the entire length of the room. Tommy insisted it looked like a stage. I pointed out that the large portions of the wall blocked out too much of the area to make it a decent stage. And anyway, the ceiling looked different. I said it probably wasn't even part of the old ballroom. Another door slammed downstairs, and we heard footsteps. Then the attic door was closed.

It sounded like a jail door slammed shut. Locked. If we could have talked, we would have said, or cried, "We're locked in!"

It became Tommy's job to check the door. "And watch out for the creaky stair," I whispered. It was already getting darker, and Tommy needed the flashlight, he said, to find his spit. I don't think I have ever heard anything louder than Tommy rummaging through the paper sack for the flashlight. I didn't say a word. I was convinced everyone in depot town heard.

Tommy tiptoed away. He didn't make a sound, and he used the flashlight only when he had to, It seemed to take him a long time, though. When he returned, he reported that the door wasn't locked. "We're still safe."

Tommy looked around the large room, getting darker every second, and I'll bet anything he wanted to take back "We're still safe". A few more doors closed, and more footsteps. Then it was quiet, and it was dark. The streetlights outside threw light up on the ceiling, but the floor was a pool of ink.

Tommy leaned over and whispered. "Now what? We haven't really checked the place over. Where's the stage?"

I said I didn't think it was the large area behind us. I repeated the reasons: too big: too blocked off . . . Tommy interrupted. He said we hadn't really checked it over. I agreed. "Yeah, I know. Anything could be back there."

"Don't!" Tommy stopped me, and I knew why. If anything could be back there, then anyone could be back there.

It was cold and it was dark. I felt clammy. Tommy unzipped his coat. Even that seemed loud.

It may have been my youthful imagination, but through that clammy dark, I made a discovery. I thought, for a moment, that I saw a huge skelton against the back wall - big enough to be a dinosaur's skelton. That was the very same thing I thought once when my parents took me backstage at an old theatre. The skelton was really just a number of boards that rose from the floor to the ceiling. Theatre people would hang backdrops and curtains from the boards. That was the discovery. The boards marked the boundary line between backstage and the stage itself.

I jumped up and headed for the stage. Immediately, I tripped and fell. Tommy scooted over and turned the flashlight into my eyes. "Shhh," he said, "you're going to wake the dead. What are you doing anyway?"

I explained where the stage was as I scrambled to my feet. We edged our way along to the stage without the help of the flashlight.

Behind the boards was a narrow walkway. Off to one side was a room that just had to be the dressing room. "This is it, Tommy; this is really it."

Tommy gave it the once-over and decided I was right. "I'll get the tools." He felt his way back to the sack. I could hear him return, rattling and crinkling all the way.

"What do you mean, me be quiet? You were the one who fell."

"Shhh," I didn't have time to argue. Tommy took the crowbar and handed me the hammer. We were on our hands and knees drumming away on the stage. I found a board that was loose. I didn't have to pry it up. It just lifted off. "Tommy," I said in a loud whisper, "roll the flashlight to me."

"No. No lights. Feel around."

I probed around with the hammer. Nothing.

The stage was not large, and within a few minutes we had almost tapped the whole stage. Then Tommy whispered like a frog was in his throat that he had found a hollow spot. I crawled over to him. He was prying up the board with the crowbar. It creaked.

"Quiet, Tommy. Pry it a little at a time."

I am; I am. Leave me alone. This is my board."

The board was soon loose and pulled away from the floor. Another board came with it. Tommy put the crowbar into the hole.

"Is there something there?"

Tommy didn't answer. He put the crowbar down and talked like he couldn't believe what he was about to say. "There's something there. Really."

I told him to get it. He put his hand back into the hole and quickly withdrew it. "What about spiders?" he asked

"Spiders? Spiders, my foot; you're wearing gloves."

"Then what about rats and stuff?"

"You want me to do it? Move over."

"Stay away. I found it." Tommy slowly put his hand down into the hole. Even in the dark, I could see his eyes grow large. "It's something."

"What is it?" I asked.

"Something mushy."

It was, at that exact moment, that we heard someone cough. It came from the east side of the room - the part we never investigated.

We cocked our heads. That was the only inch we moved. Tommy froze, like he got caught with his hand in the cookie jar. "Jane, Jane? What . . . was . . . that?"

"A cough. From over there."

"It's the ghost."

"Shhh. Ghosts don't cough."

"How do you know ghosts don't cough? You ever heard a ghost?"

We remained without moving for what seemed long enough for a ghost to cough again. "Tommy," I whispered in his ear, "grab it and run."

"Which way is out?"

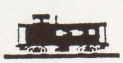
"Just follow me."

Then there came another cough, followed by a banging of falling boards.

"GOT IT!" yelled Tommy. And off we ran.

Anything in front of us would have been trampled. Somehow we found the stairs. I took them three at a time. When I got to the attic door, I heard Tommy scream. I turned around and saw him falling down the stairs. His arms were clutching him stomach.

He rolled down the stairs and out into the hallway. He ended up, sprawled out and face down. I slammed shut the attic door, and braced it with my feet. Tommy didn't answer when I called his name. I started to scream bloody murder.



Within minutes, I had gathered a crowd. Tommy was sitting up, leaning against a wall. Old Jonesy was holding a wet cloth to his forehead. The woman from the Alibi came up the stairs with a towel full of ice. She gave it to Jonesy, and he put it on top of Tommy's head.

"Is Tommy going to live?" I asked.

"Sure, young lady," answered Jonesy. He smiled at Tommy, who looked like he needed a smile. "Just a bump on the head. He's got a bad headache."

Sandee French - she's the woman from the Alibi - assured me that Tommy would be okay. She asked what we were doing up in the attic. I was about to tell her when I heard steps coming down the attic stairs. The door was open. "The ghost!" I think I screamed.

Everyone laughed. Mr. Meadows walked down the stairs carrying our paper sack. When I told everyone that we had heard a ghost cough, Jonesy squeeked his delight. "That ghost was Mr. Ebenezer Smoot, a hobo. He's stayed in the attic for years, everytime he passes through Ypsi."

I was embarrassed, and moved over to sit by Tommy. I put my arm around him. "Is your stomach okay?" I though Tommy had been hurt in the stomach. Instead, he had been clutching the treasure, and because of that he didn't use his arms to break his fall.

At the same time, Mr. Meadows knelt down in front of us and held up a crusty old leather bag. It had big rips in it. "I had a heck of a time getting this away from you, Tommy."

"How much?" Tommy almost squeaked like Jonesy. I think his headache disappeared. "How much? It's ours! We found it!"

Mr. Meadows almost laughed. That was a bad sign. "Once upon a time," he explained, "it held about $100,000, as close as I can figure."

Tommy grabbed the bag. "I'll count it," he said. He stuck his hand into the bag and came out with a handful of fur and little scraps of paper.

"I'm afraid, kids, that mice used it for years as a nest." Mr. Meadows tried to be sympathetic.

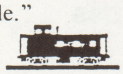
"They're not kids, Mr. Meadows," that was Jonesy. "They're full-fledged detectives, as far as I'm concerned."

Tommy asked in a weak voice, "Is it worth anything at all?"

"If those mice hadn't made a nest for years, it would be worth close to a million," answered Mr. Meadows. "Afterall, those were all silver certificates."

"Ohhhh," moaned Tommy, "I really have a headache now."

"Mr. Fletcher at the Museum might like to have the riddle," continued Mr. Meadows. "It's not worth money, but it's worth something even more valuable."



Tommy and I were the talk of Ypsilanti for about a week. We were the heroes of depot town. Tommy sent me clippings from the newspaper. I still have them, and I didn't put them where mice would make a nest. Mr. Meadows had to put a lock on the attic door.

The treasure? Well, it seems that a person who knew the history of depot town had found the leather bag when they were cleaning up the wreck in 1939. It might have been illegal money, because no one ever put in a claim for it. The most popular guess of people is that whoever found it, hid it in the ballroom and tried to leave a note for a friend, in the form of a riddle. He obviously hid the riddle in the basement of the Alibi.

All the other questions, like why the first person never went back for the money, why the friend never found the riddle, and on and on, just sit in people's heads as guesses - things to dream about.

I told you earlier that my father had become an electrician naturally. I said I wondered how I became a historian, and that I could have become a detective. I think I could have been either one, naturally. Don't you?

When my vacation was over, I told Tommy, whose head didn't hurt anymore, that I wished my hometown had interesting things like Ypsilanti. He said he was sure every town had interesting things to find in its history. I think Tommy was a very smart young man.

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